



IDSS COMMENTARIES (50/2004)

IDSS Commentaries are intended to provide timely and, where appropriate, policy relevant background and analysis of contemporary developments. The views of the authors are their own and do not represent the official position of IDSS.

US Global Posture Review and Adversarial Military Responses

W.Lawrence S.Prabhakar*

11 October 2004

The United States initiated a global posture review 19 August 2004 that meant significant troop realignments in different regions. The initiative is focused on the means to address the emerging vulnerabilities confronting US forward deployed forces in the face of the growing threat of Ballistic Missiles equipped with weapons of mass destruction payloads. In the US military glossary, the vulnerabilities facing the US forces are known as anti-access and area denial strategies. Anti-access and denial strategies emanate from weapon systems and tactics adopted by North Korea, Iran and Syria presently regarded by the United States as adversarial states or the 'axis of evil', who restrict US freedom in terms of military action.

In a political sense, these measures are adopted by weaker powers hostile to the hegemonic power, as a weaker state's response to hegemonic military dominance. In a military operational sense, it is also considered as weak state's resort to irregular or guerilla warfare measures to defend itself and deny the hegemonic adversary advantages in intervention operations against its territory; actions which can be described as asymmetric.

Asymmetry is defined as the prevalent lopsided balance in power and capabilities in any contention of two sides, however it does denote the will of the weaker adversary to pursue hostile actions against the hegemon even in the face of overwhelming strength of the hegemonic power.

The post-Cold War era and the post 9/11 periods portray the emergence of this asymmetry in various dimensions. Asymmetry in terms of power and capabilities; asymmetry in terms of technological capabilities; asymmetry in terms of doctrines and strategies and asymmetries in terms of employment of force. Asymmetry has therefore initiated proactive posture of the weaker powers to adopt measures to erode, paralyze, challenge and neutralize.

The United States perceives four dominant adversarial trends emanating from the 'axis of evil' and violent non-state actors pursuing such asymmetric and disruptive activities.

The first spectrum of threats could be the *irregular asymmetric* threats that are defined as non-conventional threats based on brinkmanship. The spectrum of threats emanates from state and non-state actors or in collusion intended to *erode* US power with attrition.

The second spectrum could be *catastrophic threats* that are in the scope of devastating

threats from attacks with Weapons of Mass Destruction on US homeland by state and non-state actors. This would have a very high collateral damage and would result in *paralysis* of its operations.

The third spectrum would be the traditional forms of *conventional threats* from established nuclear powers that would *challenge* US strength.

The fourth spectrum would be *disruptive threats* that would dent US capabilities of responses.

The responses to the matrices of US technological dominance and its dominant force postures have been in the evolving capabilities in Weapons of Mass Destruction and Ballistic & Cruise Missile arsenals of the regional powers.

International control regimes have been ineffective in this regard. The resultant development is that Nonproliferation efforts have been replaced by Counterproliferation initiatives premised on preventive defence and preemption.

The growing naval capabilities of several regional powers, in terms of procurement and building of naval platforms viewed as defensive platforms by the regional powers are considered as platforms that hinder naval access for the US.

Regional powers are now acquiring diesel-electric submarines with guided long-range torpedoes that are intended to provide the first line of submerged defence against any littoral dominance of an offensive naval force i.e. United States. The anti-access potential is established by the strike capabilities of the anti-ship Cruise Missiles with supersonic, sea-skimming rapid strike and the Over the Horizon targeting capabilities launched from surface platforms of fast frigates or large Offshore Patrol Corvettes. The inventories of the regional navies of China, Iran, North Korea are equipped with such systems.

The evolving anti-access strategies could be evident from the platforms in the Naval Order of Battle (ORBAT) of the regional powers in the Asia-Pacific of the early twenty-first century would be:

- a) Stealth platforms in frigates and destroyers of the 3000-4000 tons category of the Russian *Sovremenny Project 956 A; Krivak Project 1135.6* class equipped with anti-air, anti-ship and anti-submarine missiles. China has been in the process of acquiring these capabilities. These platforms are capable arsenal ships in scope and capabilities;
- b) High endurance improved diesel-electric submarines of the Russian Project 636 and Project 877 E Kilo class submarines armed high-speed guided torpedoes, anti-ship and land attack Cruise missiles provide strong littoral defence and offensive anti-ship capabilities. These platforms are in substantial deployment with Chinese and Iranian and Indian Navies. The emerging technologies of the Air Independent Propulsion submarines like the French *Scorpene* class known for substantial submerged endurance and longer patrol capabilities armed with high speed guided torpedoes, anti-ship and land attack Cruise missiles are being actively considered as the next order of requirement. China, India, Pakistan have been keen to acquire these submarines for their submarine fleets.

- c) The naval-air platforms include the Maritime Patrol/ reconnaissance/ strike aircraft of the US *P-3C Orion*, *Russian IL-38*, *Su-27 Flankers* with anti-ship Cruise missiles would constitute the ORBAT.

The US conventional forces realignment and its serious efforts in Missile Defence deployment efforts are part of the transformation process initiated with the Quadrennial Defense Review 2001. The imperatives of the transformation are in logical sequence, with the US Nuclear Posture Review 2002 followed by the US Conventional Forces realignment in 2004. They are intended to establish a robust seamless joint forces posture meant to enhance the US autonomy of operations in the maritime realm. The posture would imply the development of maritime-based capabilities that would provide for offensive and defensive operations *at Sea* and project power *from the sea*.

The transformation entails the withdrawal of US forward based forces in deployed in defence against the hostile powers in traditional basing posture in preference of a restructured deployment with options of offshore basing. This is intended to keep the US forces far away from the ballistic missiles targeting of the regional powers.

The US Navy enunciated its new maritime strategic doctrine viz; the Sea Power 21 Concept in 2002 to enhance the rapid deployment options of the United States with maritime pre-positioning on land bases that would serve as points of rapid movement. The accents are on maneuver, speed, stealth and expeditionary strike synergies in timeliness and precision. The objective is to gain littoral dominance for effective sea-based intervention. The US is developing a range of sea-based operations that would be in synergy with air and space dominance capabilities. The synergies based on a net-centric capability would enhance the effectiveness of US interventionist capabilities with lethal precision strikes

The United States has thus been able to synergise its technological transformation with its strategic posture and operational effectiveness and thus it has been able to derive the doctrines of unilateralism and primacy. These synergies have provided it the offensive accents of Preventive Defense and Preemption.

In evolving a seamless operational strategy, the United States is developing and deploying joint non-nuclear/nuclear forces structure. The joint operations forces would have long-range precision striking capabilities launched from US homeland on a 24/7 basis. The United States has been overhauling its nuclear forces for a new triad and developing theater ballistic missile capabilities of Active Defense, Attack operations and Passive defense that are integrated to the Battle Management Command, Control, Communications, Computers and Intelligence (BMC4I). The combination of theater ballistic missiles defence would go along with the new operational plan of flexible retargeting strategy. It would enable the US to use its Trident nuclear ballistic submarines to retarget its Trident D-5 Submarine Launched Ballistic Missiles against the adversarial powers in order to establish dominance.

New technological capabilities include the earth-penetrating bunker busters' nuclear warheads that have the capability to strike and burrow deep targets buried up to 200 meters and deliver lethal destruction which enhance the lethal striking power of the US Strategic Forces.

The implications of these developments would be cascading response from the

revisionist powers of North Korea, Iran, and Syria in further driving their ballistic missile and cruise missile programs.

The resistance to US intervention capabilities would increase in the littoral areas with the following anti-access strategies: a) *Saturation* of the littoral with submarines and small naval platforms armed with high-speed anti-ship missiles that would attempt to overwhelm defences of the US intervention force; b) *Swarming* deployments that would cluster various surface and sub-surface platforms to conduct attrition attacks and erode US joint forces capabilities through attrition.

The US is working to defeat the resistance and attrition of its adversaries by exploiting its strengths and synergies in the lethality of Effects Based Operations. It would use deep strikes with hypersonic Cruise missiles precision-guided munitions of diversified lethal payloads into the littoral and hinterland of the adversarial power.

The Effects Based Operations would also feature mixed employment of sub-kilo ton nuclear weapons, earth penetrating bunker busters and enhanced lethal conventional explosives like the Fuel Air Explosives; High powered microwave weapons that would have nuclear simulation effects, destroying the Command, Control, Communication assets and paralysing the combat potential of the adversarial power.

The United States has been evolving its future forces architecture in tune with a Capabilities Based Planning that seizes the initiative; exploits the vulnerabilities and attacks the adversary in the hinterland terrain with precision strike and focused lethal power.

The emerging technologies and platforms promote Joint Operation Concepts that would enable in forcible entry imposing heavy destructive costs on the adversary; conduct 24/7 coordinated global strike operations; maintain full spectral air dominance; reinforced sea control; undersea superiority; integrated air and missile defence systems.

At the strategic level, the United States would employ *assurance* to its allies; *dissuasive* strategies to potential WMD proliferators; *deterrence* to established nuclear powers and *defence-denial* in terms of dominance against its adversaries

In assessment, the dynamics of anti-access and denial strategies adopted by the regional powers would be increasing and impose serious limitations on the part of the United States in its ability to conduct offensive operations.

The primary strength of the United States would be to dominate with superior capabilities at all levels of the operations.

The corner stone of US effectiveness lies in its ability a) to translate its concepts into technologies; b) technologies into capabilities and c) capabilities into operations.

The US strategy would be thus primed in the neutralising of its adversaries and impose unacceptable damages on their capabilities with high costs.

* Dr.W.Lawrence S.Prabhakar is Visiting Research Fellow, Maritime Security Programme, Institute of Defence & Strategic Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.